

ARTICLE RE BIBLE
Read by Willis E. Bishop
October 31, 1989

I would like to read an article that appeared in The Orlando Sentinel a week ago. You are aware of the fact that the last of our Bible was written around 100 A.D., and the original autographs are no longer with us. Sometimes the question is raised about the reliability of the Bible as we have it today. The answer involves a lengthy study on the writing and preservation of the Scripture. This article covers just one aspect and presents some encouraging news to us. It is entitled, "Evidence of the Bible's Historical Reliability is Abundant," written by Dr. A. Wayne Lowen, and is as follows:

One of the fundamental characteristics that separates the Christian faith from nonchristian religions and cults is the concept of authority. The Christian faith holds that all true authority rests in God. The communication to mankind of God's will is through His inspired word, more commonly known as the Bible.

The Bible, in fact, is the only writing of a major world religion that is claimed to be inspired at the time of its writing. But the principal question we want answered is this: How can we know that the Bible is true? Is the Bible any more accurate or trustworthy than other literature, and, if so, can we prove it?

The evidence for the historical reliability of the Bible documents is abundant and transcends any other literature. This article will simply cite a few illustrations of the quantity and quality of early manuscript copies of the New Testament.

The first test of any historical document is the bibliographical test, which measures the accuracy of the transmission of a document from the author to the present time. The historical evidence of the biblical documents far overshadows that of any other historical document. [Emphasis added.]

There are twenty-four thousand six hundred and thirty-three early manuscripts of the New Testament available. How does that number compare with other literature of this time period? The piece of literature with the largest number of manuscripts next to the Bible is Homer's Iliad, which ranks a distant second of only six hundred and forty-three manuscripts. Next is Demosthenes with two hundred manuscripts; Sophocles with a hundred and ninety-three; and Aristotle with only forty-nine available manuscript copies. Notice the comparison: twenty-four thousand six hundred and thirty-three as over against, at the best, six hundred and forty-three.

Equally important is the evidence concerning the nearness of the manuscript copies to the original. Once again, there is no literature that can compare with the manuscript evidence of the Bible. Complete copies of the Bible, dated to within two hundred and fifty years of its completion, are available. Par-

tial manuscripts of the New Testament date within a hundred years of its completion.

How does this compare to other literature? The earliest manuscript of Caesar's Gallic Wars is dated one thousand years after the time of the writing. Likewise the interval for Aristotle is fourteen hundred years; for Euripides it is fifteen hundred years; for Tacitus, is a thousand years; and for Homer's Odyssey is twenty-two hundred years.

It is also understood and noted that if the Bible had been destroyed we could reconstruct the entire New Testament from materials written within two hundred years of the time of Christ.

Let me diverge from the article to tell you about a book I used to have. When we moved to Kissimmee I had to give up over half of my library because of lack of space. This article reminded me that I used to have a book by Evans called The Book of Books. In there he records a true story of two scholars who were discussing this very fact: Suppose the Bible were destroyed. Several days later one of them went to visit the other man, and he saw his friend had books all over his study. He asked, "What are you doing?" His friend answered "That question we discussed bothered me, and so I went to work on it. And I have located in these books quotations from the early Church Fathers - every verse of the Scriptures except seven."

Back to the article:

There are eighty-nine thousand copies, quotes from the Bible, for example, in early Christian literature dating from 96 A.D. to 325 A.D.

In conclusion, no other literature, either sacred or secular, can even begin to compare with the manuscript evidence available for the Bible.

It is a little technical, but I trust that you catch the gist of it. When we open the Word of God, we open a book which is sure and settled forever in Heaven.

Prayer: We thank you, our Father, that upon this rock we stand - your revealed word to us, which is a "lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path." It is a revelation of so many things that are dear to our hearts - the forgiveness of our sins, the payment that our Lord made on Calvary's cross, the victory of the open tomb, the ascension and the assurance that His work is completed, and that He is coming again some day to receive us unto Himself. And so it is with confidence that we turn again to the Scriptures and pray that the Holy Spirit may guide what we read and say and think together. Encourage us today as we rest in faith. In Jesus' precious name. Amen.